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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000982

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: ZELAYA CONVINCES POLITICAL PARTIES TO SUPPORT
POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS TO NOVEMBER 30

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 977

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 970

[1](#)C. STATE 114424

[1](#)D. TEGUCIGALPA 960

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya convened two meetings on October 30 to build consensus for a postponement of the primary elections, regularly scheduled for November 16, to give the country time to recuperate from the floods. The first meeting included hand-picked civil society groups, which all supported postponement (some up to February 2009). The second, and much more important, meeting included all five political parties. The parties spent the entire day hashing out the issue and concluded by calling on the National Congress to convene an emergency session and consider postponement to November 30. A senior opposition leader later told the Ambassador that the date might actually be December 7. We fully expect the Congress to follow the guidance set by this group. Post is satisfied with this conclusion, since it was consistent with Department guidance that it be consensual, fully comply with legal and constitutional parameters, and call for a short delay. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Speaking from the Ibero-American Summit in San Salvador, President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya called meetings at the Presidential Palace for members of civil society and political parties on October 30 to consider postponement of the primary elections, regularly scheduled for November 16 (reftel A). Civil society groups hand picked by the administration convened at the palace at 10:00 a.m. The groups selected included labor unions, campesino groups, indigenous leaders, coffee producers, and transportation groups, who are all indebted in one form or another to the administration. Noticeably absent were human rights organizations and legal or judicial NGOs, who had all come out against the proposal in the previous days. The group that attended held a press conference following the meeting in which they supported postponement of the elections, and most mentioned February 29, 2009 as their preferred date to hold the rescheduled primary.

[1](#)3. (C) Following the meeting with civil society, the administration convened representatives from all five political parties to consider the question of postponement.

This was the only truly important meeting and it lasted all day. The party leaders hashed out details and created a consensus document with which all participants felt satisfied. At approximately 9:15 p.m. the group assembled on the stairs of the palace and announced that they had all agreed on the need to postpone the primary elections for two weeks so that the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) could execute the most vital parts of emergency relief efforts and then be assigned to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) in order to support the logistics for the elections. The group exhorted the National Congress, which is currently in recess, to convene an emergency session to consider postponement to November 30. The postponement was termed "one-time" (unica) and transitional.

14. (C) Nationalist Party candidate Perfiro & Pepe8 Lobo told the Ambassador October 31 that he was pleased with the outcome of the meeting, believing it a good signal that the parties had come together and made a decision based on what they believed was best for the country. He added that there was concern by some, including himself, that an extra week might be needed to make sure the rainy season had concluded before the primaries were held. Therefore, he said that the date that will be submitted to Congress may actually be December 7 instead of November 30. Obviously such a decision would need full agreement for all political parties.

Comment

15. (C) With broad support of civil society groups and all of

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the political parties, we fully expect the National Congress to convene and agree to the proposed postponement. None of the parties or candidates wanted to appear that they did not care about those affected by the floods. Post is satisfied with the result in this case, as the agreement was consistent with the discussion we had with President Zelaya (reftels B and D) and followed Department Guidance (reftel C) that a postponement be broadly consensual, be done consistent with Honduran law and the Constitution (requiring congressional approval) and that the delay be a short one (two weeks). The party leaders all appear satisfied with the results, except for National Party candidate Mario Canahuati, who wanted a longer extension. The agreement provides reaffirmation by all parties and civil society regarding the upcoming primaries; allows for a smoother and more orderly primary process, since the military will be able to provide fuller logistical support; and will permit the completion of some important pre-election preparation tasks, such as the formal registration and delivery of identification cards to nearly 400,000 new voters that otherwise may have been disenfranchised. Post's Democracy Working Group will continue to work with the TSE, UNDP and the OAS in supporting the primary elections. We will provide ten observers comprised of American Embassy staff to the OAS international election observer team. We will continue to monitor the situation, in particular to make sure the delay is, as stated by the political parties, a one-time8 event. End Comment.

LLORENS